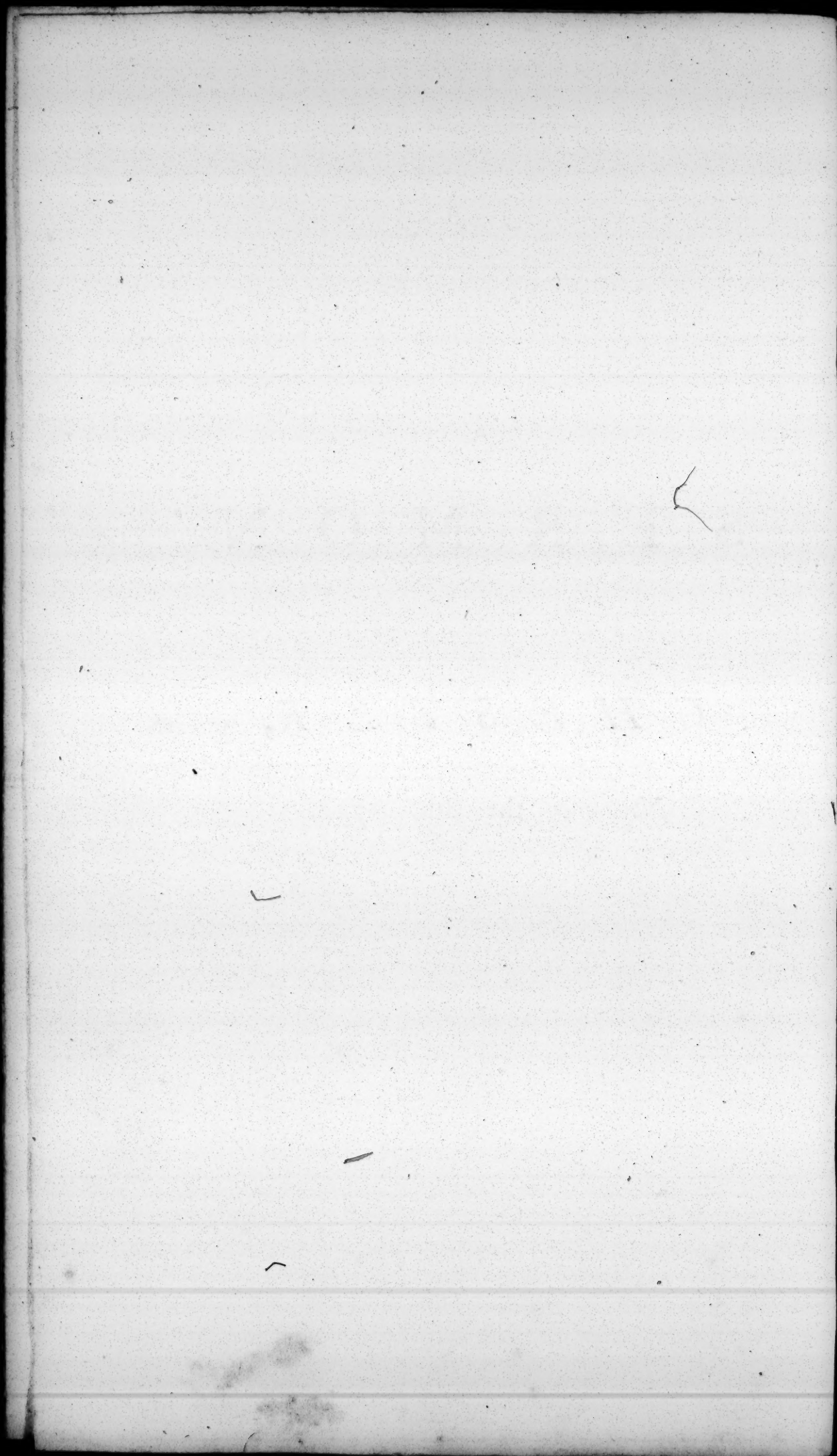


A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

C H E S T E R,

November the 8th, 1772.



A serious Call to regard Divine
Providence.

A
S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D A T

C H E S T E R,

November the 8th, 1772;

On Occasion of the dreadful Calamity that
happened there on the 5th of the same
Month, by an Explosion of Gunpowder.

By JOHN CHIDLAW.

THE SECOND EDITION.

S H R E W S B U R Y :

Printed by J. EDDOWES;

And sold by J. BUCKLAND, in *Pater-noster-
Row*, LONDON; Mess. BULKELEY, POOLE,
and BROSTER, in CHESTER.

[Price SIX-PENCE.]

T H E

P R E F A C E.

I T may be proper to introduce the following discourse with a short account of the melancholy occasion on which it was preached.

On the 5th of *November*, 1772, about nine o' Clock at night, the inhabitants of this city were alarmed by a sudden shock, resembling very nearly that of an Earthquake. It was soon known to be occasioned by the blowing up of a large building in the *Watergate-Street*, in which was assembled a great crowd of
A people

people to attend a puppet-show. Unhappily, under the show-room was a grocer's warehouse, in which was lodged a large quantity of gunpowder. It is not certainly known by what accident it was fired, but the effects are terrible beyond expression. The whole building, (the timber and walls of which were remarkably strong) was in a moment levelled with the ground, and some of the adjoining houses greatly shattered and damaged. But who can conceive the situation and feelings of the unhappy sufferers in that tremendous crisis? It is distress too great to be described; Nature shudders at it. The dying groans that were heard amidst the ruins, excited in every breast exquisite feelings

feelings, which were still heightened by the impossibility of procuring relief for many of them while life remained, or removing that vast load of timber and stones, by which they were oppressed.

The consternation and distress of the relations of the unfortunate sufferers, completed this scene of horror. Those of us who were witnesses of it, can never forget the wild amazement and despair of those who hurried to seek their husbands, wives or children that were involved in this calamity, or their piercing cries when they followed them as they were carried home thro' the streets, burnt,
A 2 maimed,

maimed, or dead. Oh ! it was a night of horror.

It appears by authentic accounts, that twenty-three were killed upon the spot, fifty-three are in the Infirmary with burns, bruises, &c. and about thirty more are in private houses, in all, one hundred and six.

But extensive as the calamity is, it must have been much more so, had it not been for the early and vigorous exertions that were made to recover many out of the fatal ruins; and the public thanks are justly due to many reputable tradesmen and others, who nobly hazarded their own lives to rescue the unhappy
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sufferers. * Too much cannot be said in honour of the Gentlemen of the Faculty, who have been most assiduously employed in administering every proper means of relief, and to whose care and skill it must be owing, that so few of those who survived the destruction of that dreadful night, have as yet died of their complaints. Nor can we help expressing our hearty wishes for the prosperity and happiness of the humane and generous inhabitants of this city and the country around it, who contributed to that large and noble

* A report universally prevailed at that time, that there were many barrels of gunpowder amidst the ruins that had not taken fire.—This was an alarming thought, and gave uncommon merit to this act of humanity.

noble collection, which was so early made for the relief of the persons and families of the unfortunate sufferers: Long may they live to enjoy that wealth of which they know how to make so good an use! This humanity and benevolence of disposition, which hath spread itself thro' all ranks and parties, we must look upon as one of the most amiable virtues of a man, and are taught by our holy religion to esteem as an essential characteristic of a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ. It were well, if every other symptom were equally pleasing and favourable as this; and if young people especially could be recovered from a life of dissipation to a wise and sober conduct, and
would

P R E F A C E. vii

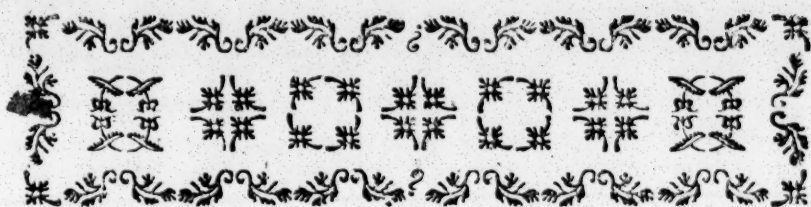
would learn to despise those pleasures that enervate their minds and corrupt their manners, that occasion such a sad waste of life and time, and are followed with such a train of miseries in the rear. The late awful dispensation seems particularly pointed this way, and calculated to carry convictions of this kind to the most careless and prejudiced mind; nor can it be thought an improper office, for Christian Ministers to improve those public alarms, which such remarkable Providences may excite in the minds of men, and which may quicken their attention to those serious truths, which, amidst the calmer scenes of life, they are too apt to forget.

May

May this rod in particular, teach those wisdom who are either too giddy, or too stubborn, to learn it by gentler methods; and may we all be preparing ourselves by a life of piety and virtue, for that great event which we steadfastly expect, even the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; that when all Nature shall stand before him in expectation of its final doom, the terror of that scene, which infinitely exceeds any thing we have seen, or can conceive, may not overwhelm us, but we may lift up our heads with joy, knowing that our complete Redemption draweth nigh!

Chester,

Nov. 14, 1772.



MICA H vi. 9.

*The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and
the man of wisdom shall see thy name ;
bear ye the rod, and who hath ap-
pointed it.*

YOU will easily imagine, that
the late awful Providence with
which this city hath been vi-
sited, and which hath converted so many
cheerful families into houses of mourn-
ing, directed my thoughts to this subject.
If it may be expected, that the death
of an *individual* of our species in the
common course of nature, should make
some serious impression on our minds,
and every particular instance of distress
excite some sentiments of compassion and
tenderness in our breasts, how *deeply*
ought we to be affected, when so *many*

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have

have perished in the midst of our city in one fatal moment, and left their surviving friends overwhelmed with the deepest distress? Oh! let a sense of religion and humanity inspire us with every proper sentiment on so mournful an occasion.

They who believe in the moral government of God, are assured that all his dispensations have some respect to our conduct, and are intended to impart some useful instructions to our minds. And the sacred writings frequently recommend these *practical regards*, as corresponding to, and fulfilling the design of such dispensations; from hence it will follow, that the awful event now before our minds was designed to answer some wise and valuable purpose in the scheme of Providence, and especially to have a moral influence on the minds of men.

The words of my text contain a solemn call to regard the Providences of God, those of them especially that
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carry with them some particular manifestations of the power and displeasure of God. The voice of the Lord crieth unto the city, hear ye the rod and who hath appointed it. There are two things in these words, which I shall take notice of, and which will more immediately answer my design in the choice of them,

First, that the voice of God in some of his Providences hath a very loud and startling sound, the voice of the Lord *crieth* unto the city.

Secondly, That it is the duty and interest of reasonable men, to consider and improve such loud calls and awakening dispensations.

First, I observe, that the voice of God in some of his Providences hath a very *startling sound*; the voice of the Lord *crieth* unto the city. Though we have no messengers commissioned from Heaven, to assure us of the divine designs, either as to mercy or judgment, yet as
we

we are intelligent and rational creatures, we are capable, in some measure, of understanding and improving God's providential acts and dispensations; and our reason and conscience will tell us that he speaks to us as really by his Providence as by his Word, and ought to be equally regarded. But some Providences have a peculiarly dark and threatening aspect, they are like the lifting up of God's hand, and laying hold of vengeance; they startle and rouse the most inattentive mind, and loudly proclaim abroad the presence and power of God. And such surely we may be allowed to think was that awful dispensation with which the inhabitants of this city were visited in the course of the last week; surely the Lord's voice then cried to this city. And was not the voice very shrill? Was not the call very loud? Surely this Providence, in which the hand of the Lord hath been so awfully lifted up, may well be allowed to merit the name of a *Rod*. And how unpardonable would it be to suffer such a loud admonition and warning to pass unimproved? But the question is, how
we

we are to hear this rod, and to improve this public calamity? The answer to this question will, I hope, prepare you for receiving those instructions which the present occasion will naturally furnish; and this leads me to the second thing observed,

That it is the duty and interest of reasonable men to consider and improve such loud calls and awakening dispensations.

And here I would observe, that it is by no means sufficient for our benefiting by such smarting dispensations to take notice only of the *fact*, to make it the subject of conversation, to join in the general lamentation, and to be borne down for a while with the torrent of the common fears; a sense of our liability to the like disasters, and a regard to our own preservation may carry us thus far. And indeed the first impressions of fear in such cases are almost unavoidable. I do not ask, therefore, whether we have felt this rod as *brutes* might do, but whether we have heard its language

guage as *men* should do; whether we have considered it as a religious dispensation, and whether our eye hath been upon him who *appointed* it. If the rod be not sent and appointed by God, it can bring no message to us. If we leave the Providence of God out of the dispensation, it is not likely to have any rational influence, or to make any religious impression upon us. Give me leave, therefore, to direct your thoughts to the practical improvement which we should make of this awful Providence, and which I apprehend consists in such things as these.

I. In unfeigned gratitude to God for our own safety and preservation, and that of those that are dearest to us. One would think it impossible for any human being to behold such a scene of desolation, to see so many of his fellow creatures involved in one common calamity and destruction, without bowing down his knees, and lifting up his hands to Heaven, in undissembled and ardent gratitude for his own preservation. Men must

must have lost their senses and understanding, they must be destitute of all that is liberal and ingenuous, to feel no grateful impressions on such solemn occasions. I rejoice greatly, my friends, to meet you here this day in peace with your families around you. How many parents, by the late awful stroke, have been bereaved of their children, and in one moment have found all the sweets of domestic life turned into bitterness! How many children may become orphans we know not yet, while those who were united in the closest bonds are torn away from each other, and the survivor left in deep distress and want. And has that Providence which hath so awfully visited many of your neighbours, spared and protected you? What returns of praise and thankfulness are due from every family, so highly favoured and distinguished! Is not gratitude the natural return for mercies received, especially when they are extraordinary and peculiar? We know not how often we owe our security to an immediate interposition of Providence, nor how many deliverances are wrought
out

out for us by secret influences on our minds, or the minds of others, whose purposes and actions may affect us : this is a sentiment that one might hope would be impressed in the strongest manner on the hearts of those, who have been delivered from that threatening ruin that would inevitably have befallen them, had they gone to the *fatal spot*, as they intended ; upon this occasion some new reasons might be presented to the mind, why they should not go at all, or not then, or they might be called to go elsewhere, or they might forget to go, or some new turn might be given to their thoughts to prevent them from going. There are many who are ready to acknowledge, that they stood on the brink of this dreadful precipice, and that their own sense of things, and their first purposes were over-ruled in a very surprising manner, but which soon appeared to have the most important consequences. If they can *live* and forget so near, so memorable an escape, they must be among the most abandoned and incorrigible of mankind. And let persons of religious disposition and character,

rafter, learn how much they are indebted to that *daily guidance*, that keeps them from fatal mistakes in their conduct, which in the most effectual manner prevents many occasions of misery, and supplies and guards every source of comfort and happiness. This then is one very natural way of improving the late fatal and extensive calamity, by abounding in all proper and becoming expressions of gratitude to God for the friendly disposals of his Providence, who hath delivered us from so great an evil, and caused our families to abide in security and peace.

2. We should improve the solemn and affecting scene by cultivating in our breasts, the most tender sentiments of humanity and compassion for the poor unhappy sufferers. A disposition to censure and condemn our neighbours is in general unchristian and wrong, but it is in a peculiar manner inhuman and cruel, when they lie under the pressure of some great calamity. To look

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upon

upon them then with horror as victims devoted to the divine vengeance, is the way to abate that compassion which we ought always to feel for the distressed. At such times it becomes us to assist and comfort them, to heal their wounds, and not to add to their anguish. And there is nothing that can more improve and adorn our natures, nothing can raise them to a higher and nobler pitch, than this amiable tenderness and benevolence of disposition ; nothing can be better or more excellent than kind affections and benevolent actions. Embrace then the present opportunity of giving full scope to a compassionate temper, and thank God for giving you a heart capable of tasting so divine a pleasure. There is indeed a small mixture of pain attending the soft feelings of humanity at the sight of distress, but that abates in proportion to the power of relieving it, and is more than recompensed by the satisfaction of doing so. I do therefore earnestly recommend it to you to exert your benevolent dispositions to the utmost on the present occasion.

occasion. Let me hope that you feel, and that you will discover the most affectionate sympathy towards the unhappy sufferers, and the most generous and benevolent concern for their relief; this is a very amiable and essential part of a religious character. Our Saviour hath strongly recommended the exercise of mércy to all who are in distress and misery, in the parable of the unhappy man who fell among thieves; how does the character of the good Samaritan shine in the sacred page, and charm every reader, who had compassion upon him, went to him, poured wine and oil into his wounds, bound them up, set him on his own beast, brought him to an inn, staid with him all night, paid the landlord for his lodging, committed the poor man to his care, and promised to defray what farther expences were necessary to complete the cure! What amiable, what godlike offices were these! These are the characters that are covered with glory, and that adorn the pages of antiquity. And I do think it one very acceptable

way of improving this very afflictive event, fully to exercise our kind affections towards those who have suffered by it in their persons or families; this will be a happy indication of a compassionate and friendly heart, conscious to the tenderest sentiments and motions of humanity. But I must take the liberty to add,

3. That we should improve the late severe and smarting Providence as an awful admonition, to avoid all those places that have any tendency to defile our imaginations and corrupt our hearts. I really think this observation is just, and considering the awful occasion before us, very striking and unavoidable. I am not one of those who pretend hastily to pronounce on the designs and ends of Providence, in every particular event. And I wish to guard both myself and you against a censorious construction of those afflictive events that befall others, to which some people are too much addicted by the influence of ill nature, or a party spirit. Some persons of narrow minds and
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four tempers are fond of turning every misfortune into a judgment, and of representing public calamities as marking out the persons on whom they fall, for the most notorious offenders, and the peculiar objects of the divine displeasure; while others, from a solicitude to avoid the charge of superstition, fall into the opposite extreme, and exclude the Providence of God from any concern in such events. But the truth seems to lie between these two opinions; for as on the one hand, our Saviour in the instance of the *Galileans*, whose blood *Pilate* mingled with their sacrifices, and the eighteen on whom the tower of *Siloam* fell and slew them, has expressly cautioned us against passing judgment on men's characters, from any temporal calamities that may befall them; so on the other hand, he has taught us to consider all events as under the direction of the Providence of God, and continually over-ruled to answer some wise design in the scheme of his moral government. Why may we not then look upon the late dreadful calamity,

calamity, as a warning given us by Providence to guard against the corruption of young minds, by such public entertainments? I own it strikes my mind strongly in that light. I have been credibly informed, that the representations were indecent in the highest degree, wholly adapted to vitiate the fancy and introduce a dissolution of manners: and that their effects on the audience were so great, as evidently to abate those restraints of modesty and decorum which Providence often makes use of to preserve men from notorious vices, who have no better principles for their security. And I confess it fills my mind with horror, to conceive of a number of people in this situation, when every sober thought was drowned in sensuality — but I forbear: the sequel is terrible beyond expression. And shall not such an awful event be taken notice of among us? Shall not the admonition sink deep into our hearts? Shall it not awaken all our attention and seriousness? Shall it not be regarded as a memorable warning-piece?

Yes,

Yes, I will hope that you, who are parents or masters of families, will hear and regard the awful admonition, that you will preserve upon your own minds an abhorrence of all sensual pleasures, that you will give your children a taste superior to such *sorry* entertainments, and that you will take care that young people under your charge, may be fortified by all the prudential methods you can use, against frequenting these nurseries of vice. All entertainments that have a tendency to inflame the passions, and corrupt the hearts of young people, have the most pernicious effects. And such places have proved the ruin and destruction of thousands; they have such a tendency to instill vice, that it is hardly possible for persons to be often present at them, without feeling their immoral effects on their dispositions and hearts; and I am persuaded that multitudes of diligent, sober youth, unacquainted with vice, have met their ruin where they only sought for pleasure, and have this way been drawn off from the useful employments of life,
acquired

acquired a loose and sensual turn of mind, and been initiated into all the mysteries of debauchery and iniquity. It is the duty, therefore, of all good magistrates and good men, to discourage as much as possible such dangerous places and pleasures, and to use all their influence to prevent the return of them among us for the future. It will be one of the happiest effects and the very best improvement of the late sorrowful event, if it abate that rage of sensual pleasure which so generally prevails among us; if every man will seriously reflect upon his own conduct, search out and give up the iniquity which he hath indulged, attend more seriously to those moral and religious truths which he hath disregarded, and set about the performance of those duties which he hath neglected; happy, if in consequence of the late awakening dispensation, we should be less addicted to those amusements and diversions which intrench on the more manly and serious duties of life; more attentive in our respective stations to our proper

proper business, to the order and œconomy of our families, and especially to the good behaviour and improvement of children and servants, instructing them in the principles of christian knowledge and virtue, and guarding them more diligently against the temptations of life, and the corruptions of the age. If these should be the effects, in any considerable degree, of our late alarm, it would be falling in, according to my way of thinking, in an essential manner with the practical design of such a dispensation; and I pray God that some good may come out of so much evil, and that we may apply, by just and proper reflection, the calamities that have befallen others, for our future caution, and to our own improvement in wisdom and virtue. There is too much reason to fear that the effect upon the minds of the generality of people will be nothing more than a transient consternation and terror; the impressions made by such events are violent rather than lasting; they affect their passions, without influencing their judgment

ment and conscience. But the *man of wisdom*, wise and considerate persons, will make a good use of such events; they will not be inattentive to the hand of God, or negligent observers of his Providence; such sudden calamities will suitably affect their minds, render them more sensible of the dangers to which they are every hour exposed, and cause their hearts to abound more and more in gratitude to that great Being, on whom their life, time and safety depend.

T H E E N D.

